

Mindfulness in coaching: identifying environmental distractions

Article

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Mindfulness in Coaching: Techniques: Identifying Environmental distractions

Abstract

This short article focuses on a specific technique, which can help us manage the environmental distractions that are a constant feature of modern life. The paper offers a short description of the process and when this technique may be helpful in a coaching conversation.

Keywords: Mindfulness coaching, meditation, coaching psychology.

Introduction

This paper is one of a series of papers focusing on mindfulness techniques that can be used by coaches with their clients. In this paper, the focus is on helping coachees be more conscious of environmental distractions from work colleagues to digital devices. The paper offers a short and simple mindfulness meditation accompanied by a short journal reflection for the coachee.

Identifying Environmental Distractions

We live in a world of constant distractions; interruptions from colleagues, mobile calls, emails, texts, tweets and social media sites pushing us the latest updates. Devices ring, ping and vibrate to grab our attention away from what we are doing to this latest communication. The popularity of these devices and our constant engagement with them provides visible evidence of both their seductive power and the nature of the human psychological condition, which is always seeking the new (Hertel, Stone, Johnson & Passmore, 2017). A trip to any restaurant, coffee shop or a work meeting will reveal how we seem to prioritize communication with those we are not with us, over those we are with.

Given this challenge, how can we help clients (and ourselves) to live more in the present moment? The following exercise is a means to help clients to be more mindful of the environmental distractions. To help clients become more able to reflect on their impact on the present moment and how through this awareness they can become more 'choiceful'.

Given the feedback I have received from clients who have used this activity, it suggests they have found productive improves, and alongside this they have seen improves in the quality of their daily conversations with colleagues and family members.

Exercise: Identifying Environmental Distractions

This exercise is a suggestion on how we can become clearer about what is disturbing our attention and how this impacts on our level of concentration and our productivity / personal relationships.

This is useful because it:

- Can help us be mindful of distractions that lead us to lose focus on the present
- Promotes self-reflection
- Enhances self-awareness and offers the opportunity for self-correction.

Here is what you do:

- Decide on a time of day you want to do this exercise
- Schedule this into your day
 - Use a smartphone app to remind you to do the exercise, or add a reminder to your calendar for a five minute meeting with yourself
- Set your timer on your phone to count down three minutes
- Take three breaths one after the other, slowly feeling your in-breath, followed by your out breath
- Sit in silence for the remaining time
- As you sit in silence, reflect on the last few hours and ask yourself "*What external distractions did I encounter that drew my attention?*"
- Use the remaining two minutes to write some notes
 - You can write about anything you like; how it felt doing the activity, what you reflected on, or your personal insights as to what you need to manage in the coming hour or afternoon.

Learning:

Ask yourself: "*Which of these distractions are in my control?*" (For example we can switch off our phones if we choose, or close our office door. However we may be unlikely to be

able to stop the drilling from the building site across the street). Focus on what you can control and learn to accept what you can't.

Self-Correcting:

We cannot always prevent external noise and distractions. But we can bring our attention to our frustration or dis-ease.

Is there any proactive action you would like to take to help you reduce distractions that are in your control?

Conclusion

This technique is short and simple to use. It helps bring coachee's awareness to distraction and encourages a more considered engagement with such distractions. My suggestion, in introducing this activity to clients, is to encourage them to repeat the activity as a daily habit for a week. When delivered in this way, new habits can form. The feedback is that this short simple technique can offer real benefits to performance at almost zero cost.

References

Hertel, G., Stone, D., Johnson, R. & Passmore, J. (2017). The Psychology of the Internet at Work. In G. Hertel, D. Stone, R. Johnson & J. Passmore (eds.). The Wiley-Blackwell Handbook of the Psychology of the Internet at Work. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell.